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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 000008

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [CU](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: PORTUGAL: DEMARCHE ON EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL
SOCIETY IN CUBA

REF: A. STATE 131637
[1](#)B. 09 LISBON 582

Classified By: Poleconoff Lucy Chang for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Per Ref A, Poleconoff met January 6 with Joao Batista, senior Portuguese MFA official on Cuban affairs, to discuss U.S. Cuba policy and Portugal's bilateral relationship with Cuba. Poleconoff briefed Batista on changes in U.S. policy and USINT outreach to civil society, and underscored the importance of EU engagement with the full range of Cuban society and continued support for improved human rights. Batista emphasized Portugal's post-hurricane humanitarian assistance over promotion of human rights in Cuba.

[1](#)2. (C) Bilateral relations with Cuba: Batista described the current state of Portugal's bilateral relationship with Cuba as "cordial" and non-problematic, but acknowledged some difficulties regarding Cuban payment for imports from Portuguese private companies. He attributed these difficulties to Cuba's lack of hard currency and suggested that other countries were experiencing the same problem. He noted that the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation visited Cuba in June 2009 at the invitation of the Cuban government to discuss the bilateral relationship, and signed an agreement with Cuba to resume cooperation based on non-interference in internal matters in accordance with a 2008 EU decision. The cooperation focuses on post-hurricane humanitarian assistance, including food security, and education. With regard to coordination of efforts with the USG on Portugal's bilateral relationship with Cuba, Batista highlighted the existing cooperation (although he could not identify any specific areas of cooperation with the USG aside from information-sharing) and suggested continued exchange of information on ways to better assist Cuba.

[1](#)3. (C) Assessment of the EU-Cuba dialogue: Batista remarked that it was too soon to see results, in practical terms, of the EU-Cuba dialogue in the area of human rights, but stressed that human rights is a recurrent theme raised in every discussion on Cuba and in the EU Common Position. He said the EU attaches great importance to human rights and encourages broad engagement with governments as well as with civil society. He pointed out that every EU trade agreement includes language on respect for human rights and the rule of law, but he also suggested that commercial engagement with Cuba and an improved standard of living could lead to improvement in the human rights situation.

[1](#)4. (C) Stance on the EU Common Position: Batista said the EU has yet to discuss and reach consensus on any changes to the EU Common Position on Cuba. Moreover, he denied that Spain was advocating replacement of the EU Common Position with individual bilateral agreements. He vaguely referred to

Portugal's June 2009 agreement with Cuba as a "document" rather than as a "bilateral agreement" and stressed the "principle of sovereignty" underlying the agreement. Batista said that Spain, as EU President, would seek to develop a better framework to enhance the relationship between EU and Cuba and to improve the lives of the Cuban people. He reassured us that regardless of any changes, human rights issues would continue to be on the table in every ministerial on Cuba, and that Portugal would continue to raise human rights and the issue of release of political prisoners. He commented that release of political prisoners, especially those in poor physical condition, is a high priority for the EU but that it is a "difficult issue" given Cuba's preemptive policy of detaining individuals before they have committed a crime and its treatment of political prisoners as common criminals.

15. (C) Support for Cuban civil society: Batista was not aware of the extent of Portuguese engagement with Cuban civil society or the extent of outreach activities at its Havana mission, but noted that Portuguese diplomats can meet freely with members of the opposition and civil society leaders. He imagined that outreach activities were limited in Cuba due to the size of Portugal's two-officer Embassy. (He undertook to obtain additional information on the level and extent of engagement with Cuban civil society.) He commented that some Portuguese missions have information centers, but did not know whether there was an information center or public internet access at the Portuguese Embassy in Cuba. Portugal, in collaboration with other Lusophone countries, is currently discussing a proposal to establish a cultural center in Cuba that would be open to the public. It is also providing 40

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million euros for two years (2009 - 2010) for food security and agricultural projects to help Cuba recover from the hurricane. The MFA's Institute for Development is funding a Portuguese NGO working in Cuba on agricultural projects.

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